

**Watchwords by Officer Tom Hanshaw**  
**11-05-10**

It seems every so often, a new word or phrase is coined to describe a crime or trend. We experienced “road rage” a few years ago and now “cyberbullying” has been added to our dictionary. It’s likely you’ve heard something in the news but many people are still uncertain of what “cyberbullying” really is. The Amesbury Public School Department has been working with community members to develop a strategy to define guidelines and deal with the problem. Other agencies such as the National Crime Prevention Council (NCPC) have been working to provide materials to educate teachers and the public. “Bullying” has been present for quite some time but technology has now taken the problem to a new level.

The home computer and access to the Internet have changed our world and the way we can obtain information. When used properly, the Internet can provide assistance with learning, recreation and communication. However, the Internet can also be used as a weapon to intimidate, scare and threaten users. The “bullies” of today can use a cell phone, home computer or social networks to terrify their victims. The victims also can find themselves backed into a corner with a feeling they can’t escape. A few examples of “cyberbullying” are:

- Sending mean or threatening emails, text messages or instant messages
- Excluding someone from a list or blocking email
- Obtaining someone’s personal information or sending embarrassing information to others
- Gaining unauthorized access into someone’s account
- Creating a hurtful web site and using a web site improperly to belittle someone
- Spreading a rumor

Victims of “cyberbullying” can become withdrawn, insecure, frightened and even harmful to oneself or others. If a victim is bullied at home, he or she may feel no where is safe. When the offender is someone the victim knows; a lack of trust develops and can become even worse when the offender remains anonymous. It’s certainly a disturbing crime and one that seems to be on the increase. It’s not always considered criminal but you may want to speak with a teacher or school official if you feel something is happening.

Parents can help to prevent “cyberbullying” and must work to address incidents quickly. It’s important to teach children, at a young age, to protect personal information like passwords and accounts. Encourage children to let you know what is going on, which can be difficult but not impossible. You should monitor what they post online and remind them that “once it’s out there, it’s there forever and for everyone.” They should avoid opening mail from anyone they don’t know or consider a bully. Keeping the computer in a common area of the home helps reduce issues but that’s becoming more difficult with the abundance of lap top computers. Don’t be afraid to visit their sites, know their friends and check on what’s being posted. There are plenty of safe sites online and make sure younger kids don’t create

accounts at sites where they aren't allowed. Talk with your kids about your what's going on and how you expect them to act when they are online.

November has arrived, which means the Holiday Season is just around the corner. On Saturday November 20<sup>th</sup>, the Amesbury Police Officers' Association and STOP & SHOP will be holding a food drive for Our Neighbor's Table. The return of "Fill A Cruiser with Food" will be held at the Amesbury Super Stop & Shop, Route 110, between 9:00 AM and 2:00 PM. I'll have more details shortly but keep the date in mind when shopping during the next couple of weeks.

Be sure to check out the latest edition of "Town Talk" on cable channel 12. Larry Frost has put together an impressive show featuring the antique car parade through downtown on October 3<sup>rd</sup>. The images are set to classic music and quite a treat!

Finally, although it's early, the annual winter parking ban will be taking effect on December 1<sup>st</sup>, regardless of the weather. Owners cannot leave vehicles parked on city roadways and town lots between 1:00 and 5:00 AM. More information will be published shortly and permits for residents of the downtown can be obtained at the Town Clerk's Office at Town Hall.